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ABSTRACT

Desegregation in elementary schools in Springfield, Massachusetts, must be rated a success. Implementation of the desegregation program, which became a reality in 1974, was successful because of the following factors: strong leadership from the superintendent; support of the mayor and the school committee (in spite of their opposition to mandatory busing); support from the community and the media; the past history of desegregation in Springfield (the junior high and high schools were already desegregated); the fact that Springfield is a medium-sized city with no neighborhoods physically isolated from one another; and the flexible design of the plan, which left no group out and took neighborhoods into account. Successful follow-through of the desegregation program involved: (1) fine-tuning of the original plan through the use of magnet schools; (2) attempts to overcome disparity in achievement by providing additional staff to better meet the needs of individual students; and (3) activities implemented to involve students in interactive situations, such as mini-courses selected on the basis of interests, science lab programs, theater arts experiences, the use of music resource teachers, field trips, and Spanish conversation lessons for non-Spanish speaking elementary students. The success of this follow-through was possible only because of funds provided under Chapter 636 of the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act. (CMG)

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Integration Does Work: The Springfield Story

In 1965 Massachusetts legislated the first Racial Imbalance Act in the country, Chapter 641 of the Acts of 1965. As originally written, the law stated that school committees were to annually submit statistics listing the percent of non-white pupils in all public schools. Should the State Board of Education find that racial imbalance existed in a public school, it would then notify the school committee to prepare a plan to eliminate the racial imbalance. Such plans could utilize revised attendance districts, new construction, additions to existing buildings, or other methods, but any method had to take into consideration the safety of children in traveling to and from home and school. Should a school committee fail to file a plan as required, the State Board could make specific recommendations. Further, school systems which failed to show reasonable progress in balancing schools could suffer loss of state general aid to education monies.

From 1965-1971 the Board began negotiating racial balance plans with five school districts. Springfield was found to have a number of racially imbalanced schools and, in compliance with the Racial Imbalance Act, the School Committee submitted a plan to be implemented in the 1966-67 school year. Plans were also submitted for implementation in 1967-68 and 1968-69. These plans primarily involved school construction and consolidation. However, by 1972, the State Board did not feel that racial balance plans in Springfield had progressed far enough, particularly on the elementary level. (Junior high schools by this time were desegregated and the high schools, operating under an open enrollment policy, had always been desegregated.) This lack of sufficient

progress lead to the withholding of General Aid to Education funds, though funds were later released after the School Committee sued the Commissioner of Education. As part of the court order resulting from the suit, the Springfield School Committee was to establish a short range desegregation plan to be implemented in September, 1973. At about this time the legislature attempted to enact a bill prohibiting transportation of pupils without written consent of parents or guardians. However, in an opinion of the Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court prior to enactment, the proposed bill was found to be unconstitutional.

At the time of this decision, attempts to enforce the Racial Imbalance Act were meeting with considerable resistance. In Springfield, the School Committee, ordered to file a short term racial balance plan by early in 1973, did not file a plan until June, 1973 when it submitted a partial plan without Committee approval. Hearings on the proposed racial balance plan, the Six District Desegregation Plan (SDDP), were held in August. Following the hearings, the hearing examiner recommended adoption of the plan. The Board of Education then ordered the School Committee to adopt the plan in September, 1974, and on May 1, 1974, the State Supreme Judicial Court ordered the city to implement the Six District Desegregation Plan in September, 1974.

Perhaps as a last ditch effort to prevent forced busing, the legislature passed and the Governor signed into law Chapter 636 of the Acts of 1974, an extensive amendment and rewriting of the original Racial Imbalance Act. A significant aspect of the amendment was a specific prohibition for the State Board to order the use of busing to achieve racial balance. However, as both

Springfield and Boston were under court orders to proceed with busing/redistricting plans, this newly revised law did not deter the desegregation efforts there. Rather, the revised Racial Imbalance Law, Chapter 636, complemented the desegregation effort as additional state monies were provided to improve the quality of education in school systems subject to desegregation. These funds, were, and continue to be, of considerable importance in facilitating the desegregation effort, in improving student achievement levels, and at making the schools more integrated.

On September 16, 1974, desegregated elementary schools became a reality in Springfield, joining the junior high schools and high schools which were already desegregated. Threats of violence or boycotts never materialized and over 92% of the students attended school on that first day. Previously, 15 of the 36 elementary schools were racially isolated (more than 85% white) and 5 were racially segregated (more than 85% black). Now, thousands of students were seated together in racially mixed classrooms for the first time in their school careers.

The Six District Desegregation Plan devised for Springfield divided the city into six districts, five of which contained one of the predominantly black imbalanced inner-city schools. Schools in district VI, predominantly Hispanic, were not involved in the plan. In each of the other five districts, black and white students were bused between the five imbalanced schools and 25 predominantly white schools. Grade structures were also revised. In each district, one or two grade 5, 6 schools were established along with several grade 1 - 4 schools (whereas in the past, all schools had spanned grades 1 - 6).

Kindergarten children, who were exempt from the racial balance plan, attended their neighborhood schools. As originally conceived, all students attended their "neighborhood" school for a minimum of three years (i.e. grades K, 5, 6) and for as many as five years (grades K, 1 - 4). While students were to be bused for from two to four years, the longest distance traveled by bus was between 5 and 6 miles. During that first year of racial balance, approximately 1/3 of the elementary school population was transported, many for the very first time.

Several efforts were made prior to and following implementation of the desegregation plan to ameliorate the impact of desegregation. In the Spring of 1974, principals held meetings for parents of students to be bused away from the school and also for parents of students to be bused into the school. A series of public meetings were also held to discuss the impact of the plan on the various communities. The school department worked closely with the news media to communicate accurate information to the public. In the two months prior to the opening of schools, the Mayor issued public statements urging that the residents of Springfield obey the law. Two newspapers and one television station communicated strong pro-integration stands. Principals, church leaders, and former anti-busing leaders urged parents, in taped radio and television broadcasts, to send their children to school. Many priests and ministers preached about the importance of integration in their churches on the Sunday prior to the opening of school.

Teachers also received training to better prepare them for working with students in multi-racial classrooms. Ninety teachers attended workshops in the summer of 1974. All teachers met for orientation sessions for a week prior

to the delayed opening of schools in September. In the Spring of 1975 approximately 140 more teachers participated in workshops to discuss integration and problems which had occured in the Fall.

Beginning in January of 1975, the city began receiving additional funding from the state under Chapter 636, the newly revised Racial Imbalance Law. These funds, averaging approximately $1½ million per year provided additional staff and programs in all schools to improve the quality of education. Much of this funding enabled increased individualization of instruction or supplementary instruction in basic skills in order to reduce the academic disparity resulting from desegregation, and a significant proportion of these funds also provided special enrichment programs and activities to facilitate integration of students.

The initial days and years of desegregation went smoothly, as have the years since. What were some of the factors important to the initial success of desegregation in Springfield? A report concerning the six district plan prepared by the Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights listed eight factors which were determined to be significant:

1. The Superintendent and Other Staff

   The strong leadership and personal commitment of the superintendent who worked for several years, even without school committee approval, to work out the details of the plan, enabled the plan to be implemented smoothly.

2. The Mayor

   The mayor made statements urging compliance with the law and gave support to the plan despite his initial anti-busing stance.

3. The School Committee

Despite its stance against mandatory busing, the school committee urged compliance with the law and did not interfere with development of the plan.

4. The Community

Although there was strong public opinion on each side of the issue, neither side advocated violence and each side used established channels to voice their concerns.

5. The Media

The media contributed greatly by accurately informing the citizens and recommending peaceful compliance.

6. Springfield's Desegregation History

The fact that older sons and daughters were attending desegregated junior and senior high schools probably tended to lessen fears of new school attendance patterns.

7. Size and Neighborhoods

The fact that Springfield is a medium sized city with no neighborhoods that are physically isolated from one another facilitated the establishment of a comprehensive plan.

8. The Design of the Plan

Several factors in the design of the plan itself were important to its success. First of all, the plan involved the whole city. No group was left out, no group was immune. Secondly, the resultant six districts were drawn in such a way as to maintain the existant neighborhoods, and

school assignments were made in such a way that students attended their "neighborhood" school for some portion of their schooling. Third, the plan was flexible enough that little modification was needed with shifting populations. Fourth, kindergarten children were excluded and were thus allowed to attend their neighborhood schools, giving them an entire year to adjust to school in familiar surroundings.

Since 1974, the only significant changes in the SDDP have been the closings of a few elementary schools due to budgetary constraints and declining enrollments and the implementation of a voluntary magnet program funded through Chapter 636 funds. The magnet school program in Springfield was initiated in September, 1976, two years after initiation of the six district plan, to comply with an order of the State Department of Education to reduce Hipanic isolation in District VI. Originally, three magnet schools were proposed for District VI, the district that was not included in the six district plan. These magnet schools, two older buildings housing grades 1 - 4 and the New North Community School, the newest and largest elementary school in the city housing grades 5 and 6, would attract white non-Hispanic students from outside the district to fill available spaces in the schools. A Magnet School Advisory Committee composed of teachers, principals, parents, agency representatives, and school administrators was established and worked in conjunction with three separate task forces from each of the proposed magnet schools to define the magnet program. Although the three schools would have their own separate programs, the close proximity of the schools lent itself well to inter-involvment. New North, with its excellent physical facilities, specialized staff, and innovative

programs would become the focal point of the program while the other two schools would avail themselves of the special facilities at times. A series of meetings around the city and tours of the three schools were held in January, 1976, to acquaint parents with the details of the magnet concept and to encourage parents to present suggestions and ideas for the program to the planning committee. In addition, every fourth grade class in the city visited New North for one full school day to experience the program available there. Following this visitation, hundreds of parents flooded the Central Office with calls asking how to enroll their children at New North. Brochures describing the magnet triage and including application forms were printed and sent to all parents of students in grades K - 5 in May. Applications came in quickly and soon almost 700 applications had been received for the 335 proposed magnet openings. Priority was given to white students whose regular school was crowded and to those students whose transfer would not endanger the racial balance at the sending school.

Over 300 applications were from black students who were ineligible for the program. A decision was then made in late June to expand the magnet program allowing minority students to voluntarily attend two additional schools with large white populations. Although schools had already closed for the summer, three days of open house were held at the new schools and were publicized in the news media as were locations for securing applications. More than enough applications were received for these two schools to fill the available spaces.

Totally, almost $700,000 in state Chapter 636 funding was expended to plan and implement the magnet school programs in Springfield over a two year period.

In order to accomodate more of the large numbers of students who expressed interest in the magnet schools, it was decided in 1977 to open two additional magnet schools which could accept both white and minority students on a voluntary space-available basis, bringing the total number of magnet schools to seven. An eighth magnet school was established in 1980-81 to voluntarily attract Hispanic students from District VI to a grade 1 - 4 school outside the district, further reducing the large Hispanic concentration which still existed in two of the three original magnet schools. The magnet school concept continues to grow as this year Springfield opened its first magnet junior high school aimed at attracting Hispanic students out of the District VI junior high school, and plans are proceeding to implement a magnet school program to attract white students to this District VI junior high school to further reduce Hispanic isolation.

Part-time magnet programs have also operated in Springfield with Chapter 636 funding. Elementary, junior high school, and senior high school students from all areas of the city have participated voluntarily in enrichment programs held on an after-school or Saturday basis. Mini-courses offered included theatre arts, rocketry, economics and law, communication arts, independent study in biology, independent study in physics and electronics, computer programming, data processing, astronomy, and physiology. In some cases, a local community college, the Library/Museum Complex, and a local professional theatre group provided facilities and expertise. In a part-time magnet program this year, junior high school students are staging a musical production for their schools and for the general public.

Popularity of the magnet concept in Springfield has steadily grown. In the first year of the program, 316 students were voluntarily enrolled in full-time magnet schools, a total representing about 3% of the elementary school population at that time. This year almost 1,000 students are voluntarily enrolled in our elementary magnets, representing about 10% of the elementary school population. The success of the magnet effort has enabled Springfield to fine-tune the original six district plan, improving the racial mix of students in the magnet schools and in non-magnet schools as well.

In the initial year of desegregation, the impact of the desegregation effort was evaluated on several fronts. Studies were made on the social acceptance of other-race students, on the effects of desegregation on future attitudes, on attendance and mobility of students, on achievement, and on public opinion.

A sociometric study was conducted in fifty randomly selected classrooms representing grades three to five, twenty-five classrooms with students whose previous year of schooling was in a racially isolated school (black or white) and twenty-five classrooms with children who were previously in racially mixed classrooms. Results of the study indicated that there were no significant differences in cross-racial selection rates between the different grades nor was there much change over the course of the year (but the change <u>was</u> in the direction of increased cross-racial selecting). However, there was a significant difference in the cross-racial selection choices made by students from previously isolated classrooms compared to choices made by students from previously racially mixed classrooms, as students who were previously isolated chose fewer other-race friends. Implications of the study were that, as

students spent more time in desegregated classrooms, social acceptance of students of another race or ethnic background would increase.

A companion study was also conducted that year to determine differences in attitude toward desegregation and prejudice of seventh graders who had or had not previously attended racially mixed schools. As the topic of the survey was sensitive, responses were anonymously recorded, although previous elementary school was recorded on the survey. Results of this study indicated that students coming from racially mixed school settings had more positive attitudes toward desegregation and less racial prejudice than did students coming from racially isolated school settings.

Data was also gathered in the 1974-75 school year relative to attendance and mobility of students within the system. Results of attendance studies indicated that the average percent of attendance at the elementary level was consistent with that of prior years. Results of mobility studies indicated that there was little change in mobility of students within the system from the previous school year to the first year of desegregation.

The existance or not of white flight, a frequently reported effect of desegregation, was also studied. In actuality, the downward change in white percent of the student population was less in the first two years of desegregation than in the two years prior to desegregation. Follow-up studies replicate these early findings in that the negative rate of change in white percent of population in the six year period following desegregation was lower than for the six year period preceeding desegregation and was directly attributable to the declining birth-rate rather than to mass exiting of students to the suburbs.

A study was also conducted near the end of the 1974-75 school year to determine if there were any changes in student achievement. The results of that initial study indicated that students who attended desegregated upper elementary schools had greater achievement gains between grades 5 and 6 than other students had in those schools in previous years.

Public opinion in the first year of desegregation was usually positive. Though parents had concerns relative to safety and neighborhoods, the city was free of any race riots. Though teachers who had formerly taught in the five inner-city racially isolated schools had more positive assessments of the effects of busing than did their counterparts in predominantly white schools, teachers unanimously agreed that the students related to one another as human beings, not as members of any particular racial group.

Since those studies during the initial year of desegregation, evaluation of the effectiveness of the desegregation effort have continued to be conducted on two fronts: achievement and social acceptance of other race students.

Results of longitudinal achievement studies in Springfield show that achievement levels of both white and minority students have risen since the initiation of desegregation. In Graphs 1 and 2, comparisons are presented of national percentile rankings of students by race in 1973, the year preceding desegregation, and the years 1976-1980, two to six years following desegregation. Results for 1973 are derived from IOWA Tests of Basic Skills of 18 largely white majority schools, 5 predominantly black minority schools, and six largely Puerto Rican minority schools. Results for 1976-1980 are based on Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills given to all students attending desegregated schools in

grades 4 and 6. With few exceptions, at each grade level and on each test area, national percentiles for each racial/ethnic subgroup have increased compared to pre-desegregation. According to principals, one of the primary reasons for the increasing test scores has been the influx of Chapter 636 funds which ameliorated the effects of increased disparity in achievement levels brought about by desegregation by providing additional staff to better meet the needs of individual students. Without such funding, it is quite possible that the achievement gains noted in Graphs 1 and 2 would never have been realized.

Extensive studies have also been conducted to determine the extent of integration resulting from the desegregation of the Springfield schools. The initial days, weeks, and years of the desegregation effort in Springfield went ahead smoothly with few negative incidents. However, merely designing and implementing a desegregation plan by placing white and minority students together in the same schools or classrooms will not guarantee that integration will occur or that students will come to accept one another. Activities that encourage interpersonal relationships must be planned and carried out. Schools in Springfield, at the initiative of principals and teachers, provided a number of special activities to facilitate the development of other-race friendships as well as to provide stimulating educational experiences. Many of these special activities were funded through Chapter 636. For example, some schools planned mini-courses which students selected based on their interests. These courses brought together white and minority students with common areas of interest in a relaxed atmosphere on a regular weekly basis.

Some schools initiated science laboratory programs in which students worked together in small racially mixed groups doing science investigations, thus increasing understanding of science concepts and also fostering racial integration. Theatre arts experiences were provided in some schools enabling students to work together to produce a finished product to be enjoyed by the school and community. Many of the plays produced also had racial or ethnic content as well as multi-racial/ethnic casts. Several schools funded music resource teachers who not only conducted a strong basic skills program but who also introduced the music and dance of other cultures and provided opportunities for students to work together in guitar, recorder, piano, rhythm instrument, orff instrument, and choral groups. These groups frequently performed in the school and community to spread the "good news" of desegregation. Art resource teachers introduced the art of other cultures and encouraged students to work together on joint art projects. Conversational Spanish teachers taught simple Spanish words and phrases to non-Spanish speaking elementary school students to open up lines of communication between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. Thousands of students participated in field trip experiences for academic and cultural enrichment and also to enable students to interact in a more relaxed non-school setting. Performers from many cultural backgrounds appeared in the schools to enhance understanding of other cultures.

In order to assess the progress of integration resulting from efforts such as those outlined above, a locally developed sociogram has been administered to elementary students in grades 4 - 6 for the past three years. The instrument was personally administered to almost 3,000 students each year by the evaluator

of desegregation programs. The sociogram is essentially an unobtrusive measure of integration. Students were asked to select with whom they would chose to work on a school project, eat lunch, pair up for a field trip, play a game, sit in class, and invite to a party. They were also asked to indicate who their newest friend was. Following the administration of the instrument, the number and rate of cross-racial selections were tabulated by race and sex. A report listing the extent of cross-racial selections by each race and sex subgroup, isolates, most popular students, and possible cliques was then prepared for each principal and teacher.

Results of the sociometric studies are presented in Graph #3. Here the percent of cross-racial selections for the past three years is compared to those of the first year of desegregation. As can be seen, the percent of student selections that were of a cross-racial nature has steadily increased since 1974 and appears to be gaining momentum as the rate of increase is also rising. The graph clearly indicates that white as well as minority students have a greater tendency to select across racial lines than was the case when desegregation was first implemented. This is sound, objective data that the desegregation effort in Springfield is indeed producing a more integrated community.

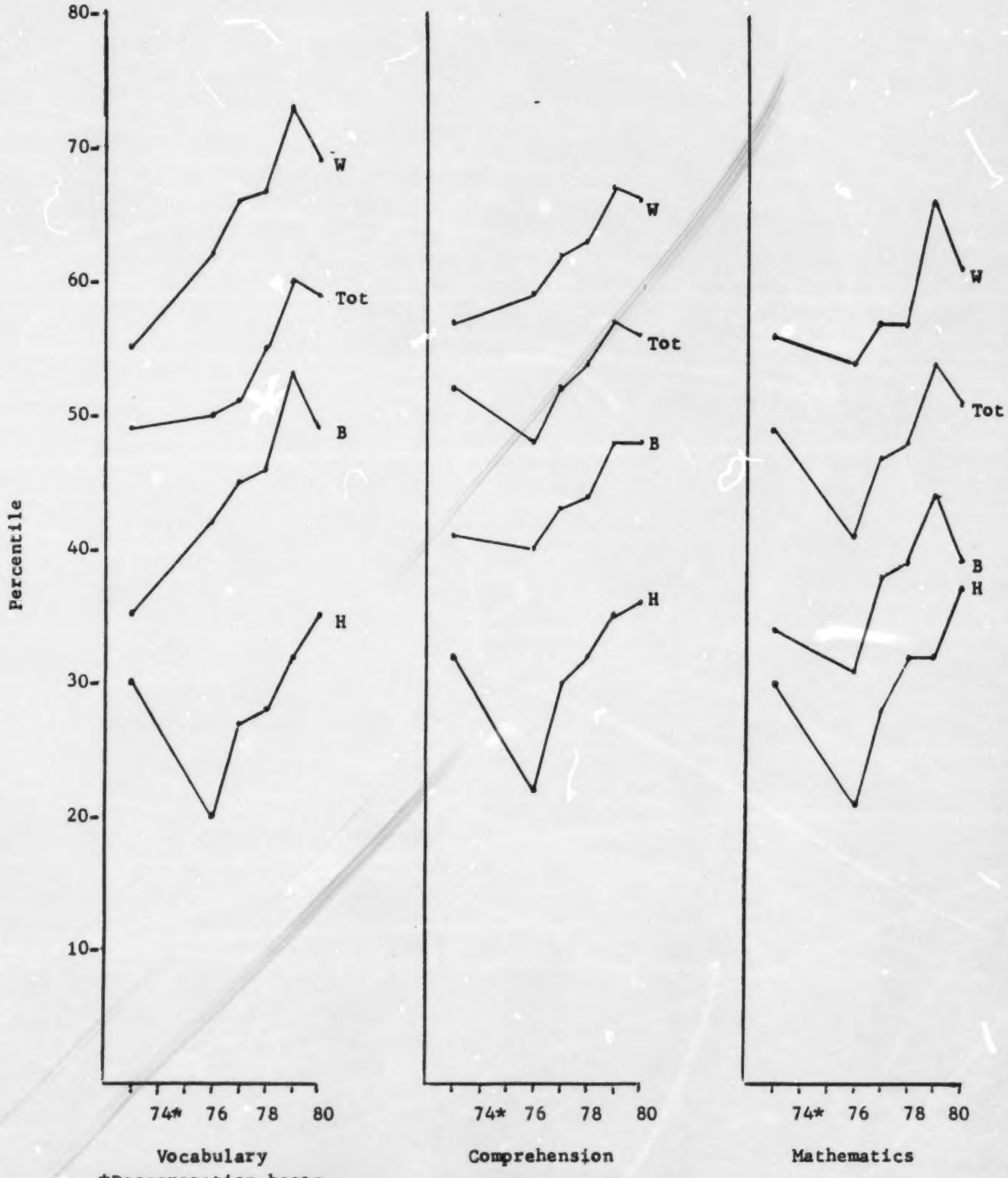
Perhaps the most optimistic sign that integration is occuring is the result of the new friend question, as students have consistently recorded the greatest percentage of cross-racial selections on this question. For example, last year, more than 44% of all new friend selections were cross-racial. Based on these results, we should expect continued increases in cross-racial selections.

Though it is difficult to pinpoint what are the successful factors that help integration to become a reality, as schools are rather complex microcosms of society, our studies in Springfield indicate that schools with the special programs outlined above have seen the greatest increase in cross-racial selecting over the years and/or have consistently recorded more cross-racial selecting than schools without such programs.

The above has been a brief account of the successful implementation and follow-through of a desegregation program in the Springfield Public Schools. The successful implementation would not have been possible without factors such as the strong leadership of the Superintendent, the positive support of the media, the past history of desegregation in Springfield, and the flexible design of the plan which took neighborhoods into account. The successful follow-through, attempts to overcome disparity in achievement resulting from desegregation and activities and programs to involve students in interactive situations, would not have been possible without the financial support of Chapter 636, the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act.

Graph #1

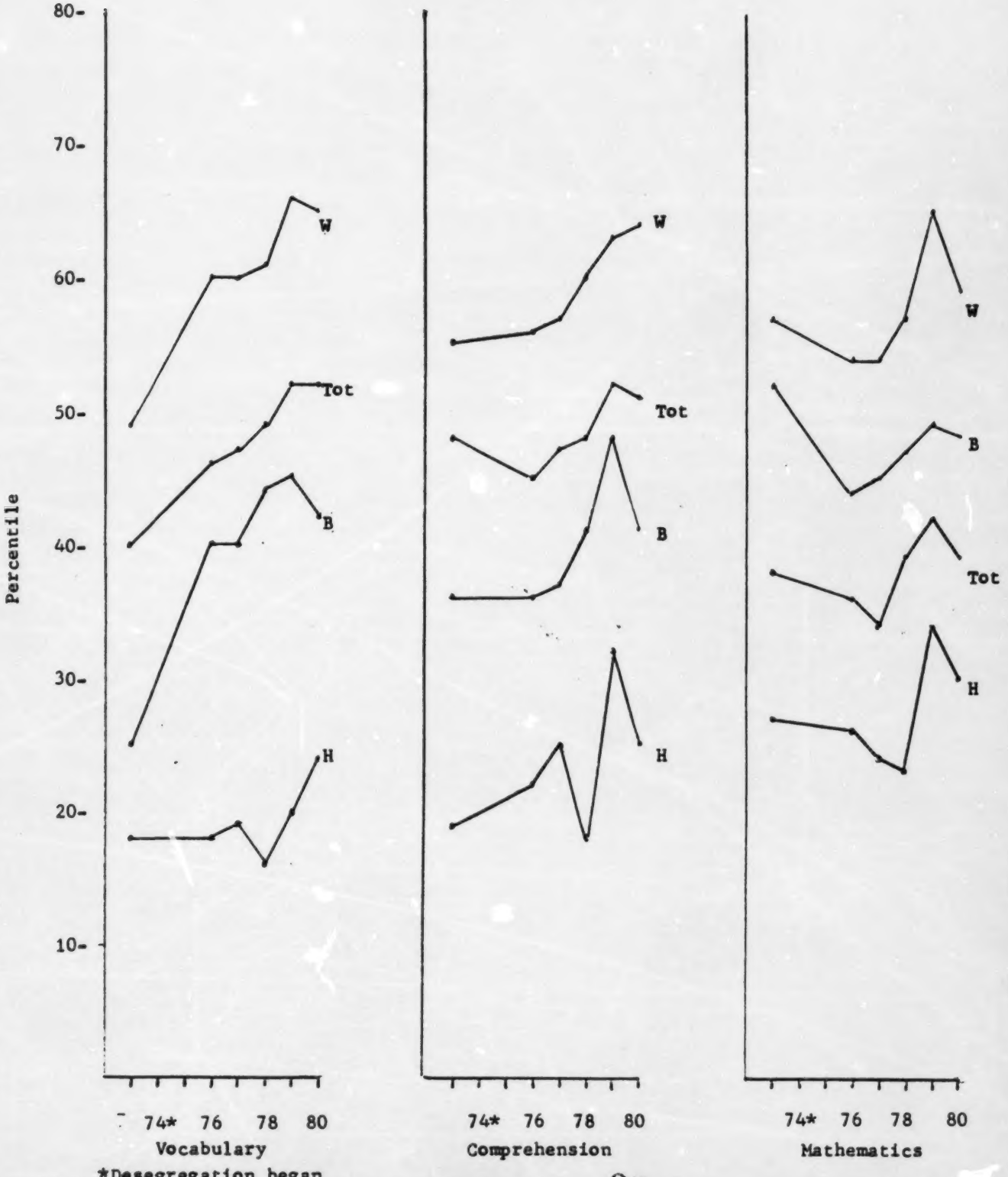
National Percentiles By Race, Year
Early Elementary (Gr. 3, 4)



*Desegregation began

Graph #2

National Percentiles By Race, Year
Upper Elementary (Gr. 6)



*Desegregation began

Graph #3

Percentage of Student Selections That Were

Cross-Racial By:

RACE, YEAR